GOVERNMENT OF THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

RESPONSE TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT

OPERATIONS' REVIEW OF THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT

Introduction

The Government of the Northwest Territories acknowledges the time, effort and commitment provided by the Standing Committee on Government Operations' Review of the Official Languages Act. The review is important for all of us who share an interest in the health and vitality of each of our official languages in the Northwest Territories. The final report *Reality Check: Securing a Future for the Official Languages of the Northwest Territories* provides many valuable recommendations for the Government of the Northwest Territories to consider in making improvements to support official languages. The Government of the Northwest Territories agrees with the Committee that the breadth of the recommendations and their meaningful implementation will take some time.

As the Minister responsible for Official Languages, I have the privilege of stating the Government of the Northwest Territories' commitment to improving our supports for official languages in the Northwest Territories. Making improvements will have many challenges but I believe that we can rise to those challenges by working together. We must all share in the work in order that we can make our languages healthy and make their use an everyday reality in our communities, our homes and in the services that are provided by the Government of the Northwest Territories. We all have an important role to play whether we are government, parents, grandparents, community leaders or individuals.

Moving Forward

The Government of the Northwest Territories is developing an Official Languages Strategy that will include implementation plans for the support of each official language. The development of the Strategy and implementation plans will be informed by the recommendations of the Standing Committee on Government Operations as well as by other reviews and evaluations that are underway under the lead of the Department of Education, Culture and Employment. These include an evaluation of the French Languages Single Window Pilot Project, an evaluation of the current Aboriginal Languages Strategy, research into service models for Aboriginal languages, an evaluation of the Aboriginal languages components of the Canada-Northwest Territories

Cooperation Agreement in Official Languages, and the development of a comprehensive implementation plan for French Language Services.

It is important that the development of the Official Languages Strategy and implementation plans address the needs, priorities and circumstances of each of our official languages. Therefore consultation and ongoing engagement with each of the language communities and practitioners is vital for helping to identify plans and actions that meet the goals and objectives that are important for each language. As part of the overall consultation process, the Government of the Northwest Territories will host a language symposium in 2010 to articulate a comprehensive strategy and development of implementation plans for each language. As we develop the Official Languages Strategy and implementation plans, we will also work closely with the federal government to seek their support.

The input of regular Members in the overall approach is important. As such the Government of the Northwest Territories is discussing with Standing Committee on Government Operations (SCOGO) the possibility of forming a committee made up of representatives of SCOGO and the Executive Council to provide input and oversight into the Government of the Northwest Territories support for each of the official languages of the Northwest Territories.

Consideration of SCOGO's Recommendations

As the Government of the Northwest Territories proceeds with the development of an Official Languages Strategy and implementation plans, it will give full consideration to each of the recommendations SCOGO brought forward for consideration. Our assessment of the various recommendations has identified that many of the recommendations fit well with the principles of our proposed strategy while other recommendations are more challenging particularly those that entail substantial fiscal and human resources..

The Government of the Northwest Territories is not providing a detailed response to each recommendation at this time to ensure that we do not bias the development of the Official Languages Strategy and implementation plans that will involve ongoing engagement and consultation with language communities and practitioners. As well, SCOGO recognized that many of its recommendations will take some time for meaningful implementation through the development of plans. However, there are a number of interim measures that the Standing Committee identified in its final report as important to address the most urgent needs of the Aboriginal language communities and the most obvious shortcomings of the existing *Official Languages Act*. Following is the Government of the Northwest Territories assessment of the interim measures identified by the Standing Committee.

Transitional Provisions:

42. Improve service delivery in Official Languages

    Response: The Government of the Northwest Territories is committed to service delivery improvements. Improvements will be identified through the consultation and ongoing engagement with each language community.

43. Provide increased financial and capacity supports to community language groups including multi-year funding agreements

    Response: Specific investment needs will be identified through the consultation and ongoing engagement with language communities. Budget proposals will be submitted to the Legislative Assembly for consideration as well as to the Government of Canada through the Canada-Northwest Territories Cooperation Agreement on Official Languages.

44. Improve communication and consultation with the community language groups and their organization

    Response: This will be a component of the ongoing consultation and engagement process.

45. Conduct Aboriginal language community consultations to prepare for the establishment of the Aboriginal Language Centre in the fiscal year 2010/2011

    Response: Consultations will take place with the Aboriginal language communities.

46. In the interim make the following amendments to the existing *Official Languages Act*

    46.1 Languages Commissioner

        46.1.1 Include NWT residency as statutory requirement

        46.1.2 Include minimum requirements for community outreach to promote Official Language rights and the Act itself

46.1.3 Review whether the existing *Official Languages Act* sections on investigations by the Commissioner's on his/her own initiative, need to be clarified or strengthened

46.1.4 Review whether additional powers for the Languages Commissioner to audit government agencies for their implementation of OLA, would strengthen the ombudsperson function of the Statutory Officer

Response: The Cabinet representative on the Board of Management will bring the Committee's recommendations concerning the Language Commissioner forward for the Board of Management's consideration.

46.2 Official Languages Board and Aboriginal Languages Revitalization Board

46.2.1 Amalgamate the two Languages Boards into one Aboriginal Languages Board (ALB) that will provide the link between the Aboriginal language communities and the Minister responsible for Official Languages

46.2.2 Change the appointment process by broadening the list of organizations who nominate representatives of their Language Communities. The intent is to involve a more diverse group of language stakeholders in the nomination process

46.2.3 Clarify the Aboriginal Languages Board's mandate, powers and its relationship with the Minister in the *Act.*

46.2.4 Include a description of the roles, responsibilities, competency requirements and compensation/per diem schedule in the Regulations establishing the Aboriginal Languages Board

46.2.5 Include requirements for board members to consult with their communities and stakeholders.

Response: The Government of the Northwest Territories believes that it is important for each language community to provide advice to the Minister responsible for Official Languages. In considering the recommendation to form a single Aboriginal Language Board, the Government of the Northwest Territories will also work with the Francophone community to identify an advisory process for French language needs and priorities. Changes to the Official Languages Act may come after languages community and stakeholder consultation. In the meantime, the Government will work with members of existing board to ensure they are consulting with their communities and stakeholders.

47. The Minister responsible for Official Languages shall include a detailed progress report on the implementation of the recommendations of the Standing Committee on Government Operations contained in its Final Report on the Review of the *Official Languages Act* 2008-2009 in his Annual Report on Official Languages

    Response: Detailed responses to SCOGO's recommendations will not be ready to be included in the October 2009 Report on Official Languages. However, the Government of the Northwest Territories plan will include updates on the various recommendations that become part of the overall Official Languages Strategy and implementation plans for subsequent annual reports.

48. The GNWT shall communicate with the Committee on the progress of the development of the proposed Official Languages services regime and the Aboriginal languages protection regime

    Response: The Government of the Northwest Territories will keep Committee members informed on progress on matters related to official languages that are covered in the Committee's recommendations.

Additional Responses:

In addition to responding the Transitional Provisions, the Government of the Northwest Territories is pleased to respond to the following recommendations at this time:

10. Acknowledge continuous Aboriginal Language loss, endangerment resulting in a need for protection and revitalization.

    Response: Agreed.

40. Future NWT Community Surveys shall include information on mother tongue and home language to allow for improved tracking of language shift in particular for the Aboriginal languages of the NWT. The tracking of language shift every two to three years could be an important indicator to evaluate if the revitalization measures put in place are successful.

    Response: Agreed.

22. Make strategic and implementation plans for Official Languages Services and Aboriginal Languages Protection publicly available.

    Response: Agreed and they will be made publicly available upon completion.

14. Affirm relevance of the languages communities for the use, maintenance, revitalization, protection and modernization of their respective languages.

Response: Agreed

25. Confirm Government's responsibility to support the language communities in using, maintaining, revitalizing, protecting and modernizing their respective languages.

Response: Agreed

26. Confirm Aboriginal Language Communities responsibility to work with their people and political leadership at a community, regional and self-government level to increase daily usage, thus contributing to the recovery and maintenance of Aboriginal languages.

Response: The Government of the NWT will reinforce this message with the language communities.

33. Conduct government wide human resources planning for the service delivery model to address Official Languages services obligations of the GNWT.

Response: Agreed.

34. Use the Corporate Human Resources Strategic Plan currently under development by the Department of Human Resources to determine the GNWT's capacity to deliver services in the Official Languages.

Response: Agreed.

37. Conduct an education campaign for all GNWT staff on Official Language services and Aboriginal Language protection.

Response: Agreed.

38. Provide an Official Languages service delivery and communication manual for all staff setting out minimum standards including for an "active offer".

Response: Agreed.

The attached table (Appendix A) contains preliminary responses to SCOGOs full list of recommendations.

Following a comprehensive program of consultation with languages communities and other stakeholders a full response to SCOGO's report, *Reality Check: Securing a Future for the Official Languages of the Northwest Territories,* including implementation plans, will be tabled in the Legislative Assembly during the fall 2010 session. The response will provide details on how the SCOGO recommendations fit into the Official Languages Strategy and implementation plans.